THE POETRY OF
THOMAS S. JONES, JR.

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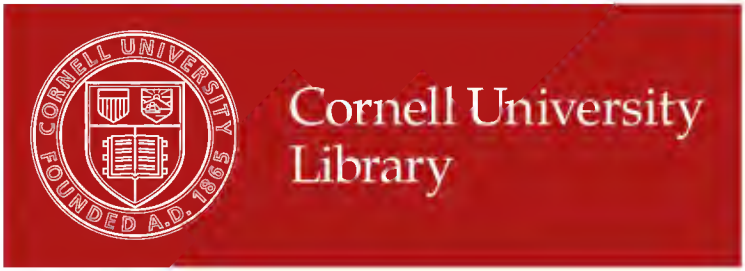

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THE essence of all fine and subtle things is to leave them unprofaned by definition, and it is precisely in this reserve, this spiritual reticence, that the work of Mr. Thomas S. Jones, Jr., has its beauty and distinction. Mr. Jones has the gift of suggestion, of invoking the mood without analyzing it, which gives to his work a delicacy of feeling and fineness of touch at variance with the technique of modern verse, which tends more and more to elaboration. In this regard he has a strong affinity with Housman and Miss Reese, though, in the main, unaffected by their manner. Indeed, when he trusts himself wholly, as in the lyric "I went back an old-time lane," or *The Little Ghosts* or *Sometimes,* letting the mood convey itself in all its sheer simplicity, his individual note is at once apparent. Along this line lies, unmistakably, his personal gift.

Modern poetry in its intricacy of form has strayed so far from the unaffected candor of the early lyrists that verse having this lucidity, this directness, has at once an appeal beyond a more self-conscious art. It is the charm of Mr. Jones' work that many of his lyrics have a lucid song-quality, and by virtue of this, and their invariably delicate motive, have been

given exquisite musical settings by well-known composers.

Mr. Jones has published four books of verse, *The Path o' Dreams, The Rose-Jar, From Quiet Valleys,* and a small volume, recently issued, called *Interludes.* Each volume turns more completely from the oracles of others to his own illumination, each is informed with a finer perception of beauty, a truer vision, a sincerer technique, and while an art that tends so much to delicacy of expression and subtilization of mood must lose something of the passion, the primal emotion, that belongs to poetry of a ruddier note, it gains that impalpable quality that renders poetry a spiritual thing.

Although Mr. Jones has written delightfully of nature, now with graphic picturing, now with infectious note, as in the lyric, "O little buds all bourgeoning with spring," which is instinct with the gladness of Herrick, — his most significant themes are subjective, and turn with a certain wistful insistence, akin to the Celt, upon the fugitive passions of yesterday and the illusive dreams of tomorrow. Was it not the spirit of youth that Watts-Dunton had in mind when he coined his magical phrase the "Renaissance of Wonder" —youth addressing itself to the enigma, of desire and pain and death? This old enigma, this new conjecture, one finds in

Mr. Jones' verse, but despite his subjective relation to life, his work is not melancholy nor negative. It belongs with the affirmative things, as his heartening and beautiful sonnet *Joyous-Gard,* for example, must attest.

One may not, in brief compass, speak in detail of Mr. Jones' poems; an instinctive sense of form, a sensitive feeling for rhythm and phrase, distinguishes all his work. Technically, if one were to sum it up in a word, it would no doubt be delicacy; spiritually, it would be subtlety. Its appeal is to those who believe in the reserve of the spirit; it has no word for those who demand of the poet a fuller revelation.

JESSIE B. RITTENHOUSE.

October, 1908.

TO find exactly the right phrase to define Mr. Jones' poetry would be as difficult as to bring the reticent, elusive spirit behind the verbal imagery of his verse into the common daylight of analysis. Mr. Jones' art is sheer simplicity of expression, which becomes hauntingly subtle in vision and suggestion when the meaning breaks upon one with all force of its tranquillity. Perhaps the clue to the inspirational side of his work, the touchstone which brings the poet's soul into communion with spiritual things like silence and youth and "buds all bourgeoning with spring," is the power of vision one feels Mr. Jones to possess in a very unusual degree; and his ability to focus our spirits to perceive the association of these delicate and eternal forces in relation to our own lives, shows how incomparably as an artist he has woven his dreams into the very texture of experience through which the hidden consciousness of the soul passes. Mr. Jones does not confront his visions of life with problems to solve. He makes no attempt to untangle unrestrained primal passions, which has become the pathological occupation of some recent poets intoxicated with the license of youth. He disengages the sublimations,

extracts those involuntary states of being, when the soul, disembodied from exterior circumstances, lives in other existences, the old that have passed and the new that are to come. These visions reveal to him the loveliness of all living things, and the revelation is a pageantry of change—an eternal recurrence, like the waves of the sea, the rising and setting of sun and stars, the blooming and fading of flowers, youth and age—moving ceaselessly on through time that is poised and fixed in the benevolent hand of God, before whose presence manifested in these visible semblances of his greatness, the poet's soul is always in an attitude of beatific wonder.

The point of Mr. Jones' vision is illuminated with memory. This new edition of *The Rose-Jar,* augmented with many new pieces written since its first appearance four years ago, and including the lovely elegiac sonnets, *Ave atque Vale,* lamenting the death of Arthur Upson, is a book dedicated to memory. With Mr. Jones memory performs the high Tennysonian mission; she is one who

> "stealest fire
> From the fountains of the past
> To glorify the present,"

and forbears the future with a wistful assurance of faith.

It is delightful to come across this insistent note of acceptance and wonder as we find it in Mr. Jones' poetry, self-

sufficing in mood, self-assured in temperamental lucidity of speech, among the strange, exotic efforts of some recent song. His lyrics are full of the deepest meanings in life; they are never made obtrusive, becoming thereby counsels, instead of remaining interpretations. They are more compellingly human because the characteristics are personal—personal in the sense that they voice what is most intimate and hidden in every soul, but which never, or seldom, get abroad in a promiscuous recital. Grief and love and sympathy, and the influence of natural objects upon one's emotions, are very secret and personal things; they are woven in some mysterious way with the intensity of one's religious temper, with one's capacity to absorb the exhilaration of sensuous life; and one possesses them with a dumb ecstasy under the shadow of silence. It is precisely these things that need a language to communicate an understanding between the soul and those inexplicable springs of dreams which reach backward and forward in life to the sources of memory and vision. The great crises in human biography do not come with the performance of physical events, in the active embodiment, for the sake of visibility, but in ideas and emotions which have long brought their altering influences in the life of the soul. It is the miracle of

some mood that twists the current of one's thoughts and feelings into new channels, previsioning the future, an abstract actuality in its gestatory period, existing between mystery and fact. Yet around the fact time weaves its modifications, wears away the clear outlines with forgetfulness, fades the iridescence in its never ceasing chemic progress, to the dull gray monotone of a million other ashen facts, and so passes it back to the mystery of memory that is but the shadow to the light of vision. These, then, are really the large concerns of the world of consciousness in which our beings move; they lie close to the mystery and might of creation, to the mystery and pathos of death,—like little springs of bubbling water breaking forth from the hillside, broadening through miles and miles of diversified lands till they empty as do thousands of other rivers, into the obliterating sea. And this is the symbol of our human lives. Well, Mr. Jones' poetry touches us at these sources of our natures, and always with

> Hint of some great mystery,
> Past the outposts of the stars.

But the suggestion suffices, as it sufficed for the Elizabethan lyrists, whose joy was a sort of infectious wonderment, and for Mr. Robert Bridges, with whose art Mr. Jones is very much akin. But suggestion of this quality has the power

of revealment. It is as a spark that sets our emotions into flames of realization. And really fine poetic art, consummate lyric art, should never do more than that. One might multiply the example, but it is sufficient to take that perfect lyric *Sometimes,* which brings the force of suggestion to a poignant issue. One clings to the meaning in the last line with the soul going through a transfiguration. The experience is one of those spiritual crises in which the personal identity inhabits alternately the substance and shadow of eternity, and comes to realize that the real existence of the soul is always in the shadow. The power of Mr. Jones' vision, generated through the stirrings of memory, is not in making the soul sensible of its unattained growth, but in vividly projecting the ideal that haunted youth's ambitions into the mood, which forces one to realize the attainment in all its spiritual significance. And it is the recognition of this essence in the soul, this significant possibility of being which youth prophesied, the always mystic but very definite symbols of the inner self, that heartens us to set our hopes more resolutely against tomorrow's fulfillment. We feel these memories of youth as the poet sings them, of vanished presences, of seasons that have passed from physical associations into time's obliterating but pregnant silences,

thrilling us as we must imagine the stirring sap to thrill the trembling trunks and branches of trees in early April. And these memories run through our experiences to quickening boughs. That is the intensely human quality in Mr. Jones' poetry. The boughs that blossom in our consciousness under the influence of his lyrical communion, are common everyday experiences of joy and sorrow, desire and regret, of hope and resignation, and all the other infinitesimal enigmas that baffle our feelings in denoting their influences, and tax our intellects to unravel the complex mystery of their bondage to mortality; but lifted in relief and defined against an atmosphere of artistry simple and subtle as sunlight.

It is hard, as I said at the beginning, to define that exact quality which seems to capture a responsiveness hidden in those secret springs of feelings, that are seldom worn outwardly in expressive action, but which become very palpable under the quickening ecstasy of Mr. Jones' lyrics. The imagery of these lyrics is always shaped so finely to the emotion; the emotion grows so quietly into one's sense, into one's understanding, with a suffusing revelation like moonlight stealing out of floating clouds. Mr. Jones never does violence to his moods; they are fine, but never careless, raptures, for he is always con-

scious of his aims to the point of shaping his sentiment to a definite exaltation. The mood may spring from a remote glimmering of beauty, or from some indecipherable signature of dream, but it comes to the reader as the essence of a spiritual experience that quickens the pulse to realization. Take the lyric *The Little Ghosts,* and also *In the Fall o' Year,* and one sees how perfectly Mr. Jones has brought substance and form to crystallization. The quiet ecstasy in these verses shimmering about the delicate instincts of virgin life; is it not this that so pervasively impels one's spirit to joy? Youth in humanity, buds and blossoms in flowers and green growing things, spring in the year's seasons, young love in young hearts —pure and potential consciousness in life and nature—it is to these things that the poet is exquisitely sensitive, attuned and vibrant in every rapturous pulse, folding about them his brooding imagination, as a dove folds her protecting wings about her young. Yet this particular note of youth is curiously akin to deeper issues, just as the poet makes nature the medium through which to emphasize some human sentiment. The lyrical web is spun with symbols that decorate the emotional design. Read the lyrics, *Youth* and *Primavera,* and this contact of differences is revealed. The abstraction is always maintained, a

little wistfully, as if for something longed for beyond possible capture, but always existent, and therefore, a refraction of fate.

The sonnets in this book are of the very best in recent American poetry. They are, as the very best sonnets should be, lyrical in substance and inevitable in their exactness to the prescribed form: *Joyous-Gard, A Deserted Village,* and the elegiac sequence in memory of Arthur Upson, the fourth of which, with its stately Shakespearean phrasing, holds one in its "moment's hush of lifted wings." One must not fail also to number among these *On an Idyl of Theocritus,* which is redolent of the pastoral soil that gave it birth.

Perhaps the highest and most particular service, in one sense, rendered to poetry in this book, is the repudiation of that sophistry with which so many modern poets regard nature; and this Mr. Jones has done in two of the loveliest of modern American lyrics, whose inspiration, coming from nature, flowers in a human sentiment—the tenderest sentiment in the heart of man. *Two Songs in Spring* would grace an Elizabethan anthology. A magical conceit and art—art that takes spring and her incomparable loveliness for the speech of a simple but intense feeling of the soul. Here indeed is "inarticulate delight" put into words that render joy

transparent. We shall have to recall Mr. Bridges' "I love all beauteous things," or "I have loved flowers that fade," to match it. And one who does not catch the felicity of the very first line must indeed have lost all savor for a pure draught from the very springs of Helicon.

WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE.

February, 1910.

THE little quiet pulling things of life have seldom been expressed more simply and feelingly than in the poems of Mr. Jones. If a sure instinct and the gift of sympathy be united to an earnest and abiding sense of life's sanctities, the expressional result will reflect most hauntingly a realization of all that is deservedly held to be of spiritual import. Accordingly, the test of the spiritually conceived lyric is the test of reverent sympathy, and the poet who will have stood this test without engendering a suspicion of inadequate sincerity, will have proven himself to be in a very real sense one of those set apart and consecrated to the service of the Holy Grail.

Now this poetic phase is much more than an attitude toward life. It is itself life, if by life we mean the sustaining and directing force which shapes a created thing to a beautiful and glorifying end; and since in life, whose energy is guided through consecration, the spiritual import is of much the more enduring and ennobling consequence, so also in poetry, whose energy is guided through consecration, the same vital principle is equally true and abiding in its significance.

It is this aspect of poetry which we

feel to be ever present as the vital element in Mr. Jones' singing, guiding it triumphantly through the opposing pitfalls of sense and intellect, to a controlled expression, none the less free, of the spiritual significance contained in all those incidents, or little adventures, which by the very frequency of their occurrence would seem to have lost for most men, and most poets as well, the beauty that was the first purpose of their very existence. Mr. Jones has the shaping gift. He crystallizes the beauty through a symbol that reflects in a little regarded loveliness the import of a fleeting verity. Most often the poet's outlook is through the lens of memory, undimmed save by the sadness which the recollection of lost happiness and lost opportunity must inevitably engender. Simplicity is seldom touched to a more poignant issue untinged of doubt than in the wistful lyric of tearful reticence entitled *The Little Ghosts.*

Where are they gone, and do you know
  If they come back at fall o' dew,
The little ghosts of long ago,
  That long ago were you?

And all the songs that ne'er were sung,
  And all the dreams that ne'er came true,
Like little children dying young—
  Do they come back to you?

And there is a little companion which

falters before the memory, yet bravely phrases it,

SOMETIMES

Across the fields of yesterday
He sometimes comes to me,
A little lad just back from play—
The lad I used to be.

And yet he smiles so wistfully
Once he has crept within,
I wonder if he hopes to see
The man I might have been.

You see the transmutation is so rapid that the poet scarcely detects it. The feeling narrows down to the symbol, and then all at once the symbol widens out into the truth; and since the feeling and the truth are commensurate, you have a little sphere of beauty. The pulling and the emotion have given the lyric poise. The outcome is a trembling crystal.

It is often true that the very simplicity of beauty is baffling. It is so hard to realize that the sum of all colors is white, that the asceticism of purity is the sum of all riotous variety. Especially to those whose sense is finely adjusted to perceive the subtlest aspect of natural beauty, the temptation is to pursue beauty as it flies, to choose the rose and forbear the lily, to seek the beauty of life rather than to express its implicitness. Now one must repudiate this attitude, or otherwise confess to a very real limitation which will eventually prove to be its own sadness

and regret. One must look inward rather than outward, and then will he discover a secret. For all that is without,—the wonder and mystery of all that natural beauty,—all this will he find reflected in the chalice of his own believing heart. But the condition of this is purity.

Now of such is the poetry of Mr. Jones. To him, since his heart has been pure, life holds promise that is reflected from what has gone before. Memory even becomes prophecy under the light of beauty, and voices its message insistently in an undercurrent of suggestion. Such poets are not professed teachers. Rather do they remind us of the Beloved Disciple. They do not penetrate slowly to the core: they are at the core and radiate outward. Beauty speaks through them: they have no need to apostrophize her. When beauty burns in them as well their identification is complete, and they are with the Grail.

To such, and they are few, the pageant of nature is only a background for the tabernacle of their own souls. Witness the fourth sonnet of *Ave atque Vale,* an elegiac sonnet-sequence in memory of ill-fated Arthur Upson, the valorous poet whose torch was bequeathed through sympathy to those who should come after him.

I stood to day upon time's border-land
  And looked far off across each rolling year,
  Yet scarcely their great thunder did I hear
Nor marked the wreckage of the changing sand;

For one soft note persuasive did command
All other tones that reached my quickened ear,
And in that note a message low and clear
That I so plainly seemed to understand.

As in the saddened passing of fair things,
The sorrow of the sunset and the dawn,
For death that comes when life's hour least should fail—
Ever the moment's hush of lifted wings,
A gleam of wonder ere the flood is gone . . .
The host uncovered from its mortal veil!

This omnipresent sense of the sacramental beauty of human life as manifested in the rapt spiritual experiences through which it is permitted to pass, has of late become the most vital note in Mr. Jones' poetry, justifying the expression by the sanction of a very genuine mystical belief in the action of the divine force as an inspirational factor, through the ministry of those that have gone before to those who are struggling in the noble endeavor to achieve.

Never does Mr. Jones betray an undue familiarity with his moods. Ever he shows himself content to be the vessel of the revelation. Far from claiming equality with his song, he ever approaches it with mingled wonder and reverence, and this clothes the inspiration with an intimate human beauty which is of the very essence of romance. This attitude of wonder and reverence is none the less akin to a genuine recognition and contact with the inspira-

tional power, most beautifully exemplified in *Joyous-Gard.*

Wind-washed and free, full-swept by rain and wave,
  By tang of surf and thunder of the gale,
  Wild be the ride yet safe the barque will sail
And past the plunging seas her harbor brave;
Nor care have I that storms and waters rave,
  I cannot fear since you can never fail—
  Once have I looked upon the burning grail,
And through your eyes have seen beyond the grave.

I know at last—the strange, sweet mystery,
  The nameless joy that trembled into tears,
    The hush of wings when you were at my side—
For now the veil is rent and I can see,
  See the true vision of the future years,
    As in your face the love of Him who died!

No poet feels the fresh ardent joyousness of the beautiful life, symbol of hope, more keenly than he; though through it all the mood of Keats, in poring upon youthful ambition, runs as a sad corrector of the leaping joy which will never find its fulfillment. The sadness of youth with all its hopes and anticipations, never to be realized, haunts the poet more than any other sorrow, and tunes his spirit to a forbearing expression whose wistfulness betrays an instrument strung tightly and responsive to the subtlest note.

Mr. Jones' development from the rondeau stage to his present technical mastery of the sonnet would be an interesting study in advancing technique; but it would hardly be a profitable subject for criticism, if by criticism we understand studies

in spiritual interpretation. More vital is the bounding note of wonder at the beauty of life which reflects itself in pure exulting lyric gladness. *Two Songs in Spring* phrases consummately an overmastering tide of loveliness to which the poet abandons his heart. One suspects that we are harboring an Elizabethan unwittingly in our midst. I quote the first of these spring-songs.

> O little buds all bourgeoning with Spring
> You hold my winter in forgetfulness;
> Without my window lilac branches swing,
> Within my gate I hear a robin sing—
> O little laughing blooms that lift and bless!
>
> So blow the breezes in a soft caress,
> Blowing my dreams upon a swallow's wing;
> O little merry buds in dappled dress,
> You fill my heart with very wantonness—
> O little buds all bourgeoning with Spring!

Now this is the very highest achievement, —it takes rank with Mr. Bridges at once in feeling and expression. Here the outer force acts on the poet directly, crystallizing all longings unfulfilled and transmuting them instantly into the greatest joy. This poem, were there no other, would be a complete sanction for a life devoted to the dream. But on the contrary, it by no means stands alone. I quote it only as a symbol of the poet's joyousness. No one but a child could have written it. The nature symbol, however, serves also as a spring wherefrom to recover past mem-

ory to serve a present and a future need. For what has once been is and, if it be of beauty, shall not perish.

I feel that this, after all, is the unvoiced message of Mr. Jones,—to prove the immortality of fleeting beauty, by sympathy and reverence to look within and find there what the poet seeks without and cannot find. This, a true faith, forecasts the future.

Tenderness has not been a familiar note in recent American poetry,—sincere tenderness which actuates the song. And for this reason it is the more refreshing to find one within whose heart it wells up to the present need and dispenses a gentle beauty to a literature which was arid for its lack. To unite tenderness with faith and hope completes the circle of beauty, and the presence of this trinity of inspiration is the test of the lyric singer. Mr. Jones has won through experience the golden key. He has not feared to use this key that he might open the tabernacle: combining humility and reverence with faith and courage, he has found the Grail. And so to us comes Beauty through the consecration of a poet's loneliness.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.

September, 1910.

By MISS RITTENHOUSE

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THE POETRY OF THOMAS S. JONES, JR.

BY JESSIE B. RITTENHOUSE

PERHAPS nothing could so emphasize the crystalline clarity of the work of Thomas S. Jones, Jr., as to contrast it with the verse of the cryptic school for the moment in vogue in America. Technicians of this school—for one can scarcely call them poets—display such ingenuity in the endeavor to mystify that one is amazed at their dexterity, the while he stands hopeless, and helpless, before it. If one were not convinced that this is a phase soon to pass, as all abnormalities in art must pass, he would despair of the state into which poetry has fallen.

The first demand of art is that it be intelligible, that the artist himself have a clear conception of what he would convey, or if it be a growing conception, clarifying and developing as he executes

the theme, that it shall in the end reflect a pure intelligence, a focused thought, not one befogged by a deliberate attempt at obscurity. The misapprehension under which the so-called metaphysical poets, now in the public eye, seem to be laboring is that one cannot be at the same time clear and profound, whereas nothing is profound, but merely turgid and confused, that will not yield its meaning to an intelligent reader.

From the outset, and it is now rounding the second decade since his first book appeared, the work of Thomas S. Jones, Jr., has stood in the white light which emanates from idealistic poetry, but not in the limelight, for the two are incompatible. It is impossible for a poet who is possessed by his vision, who has the spiritual urge toward the expression of beauty as he apprehends it, to be taking thought at one and the same time for the exploitation of that vision. On the contrary, he will shrink from it as a profanation. He is impelled to speak, but he knows not who will hear. He sends his words into the infinite, knowing they will reach those for whom they are intended. It did not distress Shelley that few heard during his lifetime, that his voice was drowned by the voice of

Byron and others who had the public ear. With perfect complacency he declared that he had written *Prometheus Unbound* for five persons, and doubtless he would have written it had none responded.

The poet, as distinguished from the craftsman, has the burden of utterance laid upon him; he may be the voice crying in the wilderness, but he is none the less obeying the injunction to make straight in the desert a highway for his God. At no period in American literature has the poet who holds his art as a consecration been so isolated as during the last ten or twelve years, when the entire focus of poetry has been upon form and when those who would not turn to the startling or bizarre found themselves stigmatized as conventional. The cynical strain which has crept into modern poetry also, the ironical and satirical vein, in line with the same vein in fiction and drama, still further isolates the poet whose work belongs to the constructive rather than destructive forces of life.

Unless the poet can look deeper than other men, below these things which make for cynicism, and not satirize life but reveal it, he is no less purblind

than the rest and has no right to demand that we see through his eyes. It may be said of Thomas S. Jones, Jr., that he has always seen clearly, that he has the vision implied in the words "if thine eye be single," the ability to look through all the baffling contradictions of life to the one Life, to see the Perfection through all the imperfection of its human manifestations.

It is this vision which has been the source, the inner compulsion, of his poetry. It was expressed most explicitly, perhaps, in his well-known poem, *In Excelsis*, which inspired Edith Thomas with one of her own best lyrics, but it is inherent in all of his work embodied in *The Rose-Jar*, *From Quiet Valleys*, *The Voice in the Silence* and several other volumes which were the fruit of his first creative years. Deep within a certain wistful note, as a tone within a tone, is a serene and ineradicable joy which gives a mellow beauty to all that he does:

> I wonder if the tides of Spring
> Will always bring me back again
> Mute rapture at the simple thing
> Of lilacs blowing in the rain.

If so, my heart will ever be
  Above all fear, for I shall know
There is a greater mystery
  Beyond the time when lilacs blow.

In these exigent days which carry us on too rapidly for contemplation, when life is so complicated and absorbing, demanding more and more of the individual, such poetry as that of Mr. Jones' offers a refuge, a sanctuary, as though one suddenly withdrew from a crowded, garish street into some exquisite place of tempered light.

Into one line of an early lyric he has put perhaps the secret of that beauty which trances his work with a certain magic stillness, the line which speaks of

That last strange peace whose name is loneliness.

Here is the mystical turning back of the soul from all external things, the solitude which is the divine companionship, expressed by Lionel Johnson in the line,

Lonely unto the Lone I go.

No poet of our day has known this "strange peace," this sense of the divine immanence, more deeply than Mr. Jones has known it; at least no poet has made us more conscious of it in his work.

He has not won through to this serener air, however, without the struggle and adjustment which come to all thinking people. It is not wholly an intuition but a victory. Mr. Jones has not the cheap philosophy that all's well with the world, but the hard-won philosophy that takes full account of what is wrong with the world, while he sees with the larger understanding what is emerging through it all. It was, indeed, a source of wonderment to me when I first knew Mr. Jones' work, with its golden light as of the sun through stained glass, that a poet of a challenging mentality and a crusader's temperament, ready to break a lance at any moment for his ideal, should, when it came to the expression of his art, be able to suffuse it with the light which never was on sea or land. It is because he has the gift to subtilize all experience until it passes into its finer meaning, its spiritual residue.

There are poets born to depict, to give us the event, the gross fact, and there are poets born to

interpret, to give us the inner meaning of the event, the finer significance of the fact. A man like Sandburg, for example, who works wholly in the raw material of life, presents a great picture of the human swarm in its welter of existence, but this is photographic. We demand of him a finer vision, some intimation of the end, the spiritual evolution working through this chaos of life.

No one could be more removed in his approach to the human problem than a poet like Mr. Jones from a poet like Sandburg, and this is not in any sense to say that Sandburg is not a tremendous force in modern literature, but merely that he is an extreme instance of the objective poet, of one who spreads life before you in all its phases as it functions physically, whereas a poet like Mr. Jones is concerned with humanity as it functions spiritually, and with the force which has brought it thus far, though æons yet from its perfection.

It must have been some such thought as this which led him into a field of research which has turned under his hand into a field of enchantment to which we are admitted in the two volumes, *Sonnets of the Cross*, and *Sonnets of the Saints*, volumes which not only belong indubitably to the

realm of high poetry, but form a wonderful study of the evolution of Christianity in Britain from the Druid period through several centuries of the early church, with all the romantic and dramatic background involved; for the lives of the saints are sheer drama, and one sonnet of Mr. Jones' may contain the germ of a miracle-play or the material for an absorbing novel, if one could be found with the combined reverence and art to approach it.

The word "saint" is a deterrent to most people, connoting, as it does, a certain sanctity which places the canonized above the ranks of humanity, but one does not stop to think that the saints were militant human beings who fought for their ideals and about whom the most picturesque events constantly took shape. Any one of them was the center of a thrilling drama, and no richer field from the standpoint of pure literature can be found than that which re-creates for us these lives and unfolds them in a sequence so that we see the influence of one upon another and the unconquerable progress of the spirit.

It is certain, however, that Mr. Jones did not approach these lives from the vantage ground of

literature or with the intention so to utilize them, but wholly from an absorption in the great story of Christianity as it won its way in Britain. There are six sonnets of the pre-Christian period which show the intercourse between Tyre and the East and Britain before the coming of Joseph of Arimathea to Yniswitrin, sacred isle of the Druids and by legend site of the first wattled Christian church, said to have been built about 63 A. D., by Joseph, who brought with him relics of the Passion.

Sonnets of the Cross trace the progress of the faith from Glaston and Whithorn to Ireland, to Iona, to Northumbria, the christianizing of the North by Oswald and Aidan and the recording of the faith by Bede.

The second volume, *Sonnets of the Saints*, perhaps the more beautiful of the two, having such rich material that each sonnet is like a bit of tapestry, carries the story down to the period of Saint Thomas Aquinas and forms in a sense a sequel to the first volume. Together they show a knowledge of the period so profound that one is abashed before it, or would be save that this knowledge has become so much a part of the poet's own mind and soul as to seem not an acquisi-

tion but an experience, something that he has felt and lived as completely as if he had been a participant in the events recorded. As in all of Mr. Jones' work, the mere fact has become to him subjective, or perhaps we may say that it has become sublimated, that it has taken on its spiritual aura and emerges irradiated with that light which is so peculiarly his gift and distinction.

The sonnets are flawless in artistry, and one might feel that they had been cut like jewels, did he not know from the entire evidence of Mr. Jones' work that his art is not conscious but instinctive, that he has the feeling for words which belong to him, words of amber and crystal, of subdued warmth and brightness, such as these in *The Blessing of Columcille:*

Torqued warriors turned their galley's crimson prow
  To hear a white monk hymn the Holy Three
  In Derry's orchard vale beside the sea,
The light of peace upon his shining brow;
And angels, watching near the forest plough,
  Saw Colum's blessing change the withered tree,
  Cursed by the demon riders from the shee,
And bring the wild sweet apples to the bough.

Beneath his voice, clear as a ringing bell,
  Dark kerns laid down their spear-shafts, then were still,
    And in each bitter heart the sweet fruit grew;
Dim oak woods, wakened from the Druid spell,
  Shone white with wings; and on the sunset hill
    The old gods listened, lonely in the dew.

Magic grows more and more rare in poetry, but here it is, pristine and unmistakable, in the line,

The old gods listened, lonely in the dew.

Nor is it verbal magic alone, but that larger magic of suggestion, of implication. Here is all the pathos of a bygone beauty. The old order passes, in the faiths of men as well as in temporal life, but not without leaving a precious residue, something embalmed forever in the imagination with things lost and dispossessed, which still have a being and reality more palpable than things which we see and touch.

It is that Mr. Jones makes us free again of epochs that have passed into the twilight of memory, restores for us the glamour of far-off things, that these sonnets are so exquisite as poetry, and it is as poetry that we are chiefly

concerned with them, though they are of great importance in the realm of devotional literature since they focus an entire period, the whole expression of early Christianity in Britain, through the many personalities and events which attended its unfolding. So far as I know, there is nothing in English literature which makes this focus, certainly not through a sequence of sonnets, and Mr. Jones' poetry would be sure of a place on this ground alone, but far more surely for the intrinsic quality of the sonnets themselves, for an art which is above praise.

The sonnets are not mystical, save as the word connotes a sense of spiritual realization. They have not the abstract quality which usually accompanies mystical verse. Their emphasis is upon the human; they are of lives, but of lives under compulsion of the divine. The simplest incident which shows this compulsion may be the subject of a sonnet and one of my favorites, because of its tenderness and the quiet loveliness of the picture, is *The Silver Wain*, a legend of St. Isidore the Ploughman:

When russet wagons left the Lammas field,
  The land's fierce lord through wood and pasture rode
  Along the trembling pool where sunset glowed
Red as the rivets of his heavy shield;
Across the blackbird's song a clear bell pealed,
  And tawny bulls, obedient to the goad,
  Paused while a peasant prayed beside his load
Sweet with the grass that clovered meadows yield.

On rushed the knight, but dropped his lifted spear
  To see among the swathes of fallen hay
    White oxen coupled with a golden chain,
And, still as starlight on the purple weir,
  Where his old ploughman knelt so late to pray
    An angel walking by a silver wain.

Perhaps we have space to put into contrast a more dramatic sonnet, not the most dramatic, which is *The Stag of Cheddar*, but one which shows Love actuating a deed, a deed which turns under Mr. Jones' hand to an unforgettable bit of art, but which we feel instinctively he did not approach as art but as an expression of that Love which Dante declared moves the sun and all the other stars. The deed is that of St. Anselm succoring the wounded hare:

By grange and castle when the fields were cool
  Saint Anselm rode and marked how swans afloat
  Upon the lilied waters of the moat
Reposed in love untaught by rod or rule;
And while he paused beside the reedy pool,
  A brindled hare with blood upon her coat
  Took refuge from the pack's deep baying note
Beneath the scarlet housings of his mule.

But when the savage hunters sought their prey,
  At his command their hounds refused to spring,
    Held back like wolves within a forest snare;
And with bent bows, they watched him ride away,
  Tender as Christ Who heals each broken thing,
    Bearing against his breast the wounded hare.

Robert Tristram Coffin, himself a poet of distinction, has caught the charm of Mr. Jones' work in a phrase—"running water, smooth and sun-shot." It is a fitting symbol, for sun-shot water has a magic. It turns even the stones over which it passes into gems. And running water has a music which holds within its tranquillity an irresistible joy.

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